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BABYLONIAN AND ASSYRIAN MEMORANDA.

Through the gift of Mr. Henry G. Stevens, the Institute has come into possession of thirty-six small inscribed Babylonian and Assyrian tablets of burnt clay, which together with the Assyrian brick given to the Museum by Mr. George S. Waite some years ago, have been assembled and placed on exhibition in the East Room on the first floor of the Museum, where they form a very interesting commentary on a civilization that antedates the Christian era by many centuries.

In the Tigris and Euphrates valleys, as in the valley of the Nile, an excellent modelling clay, firm in texture and close-grained, was extremely plentiful. It furnished the material for the bricks which were used so extensively in the construction and decoration of Assyrian and

Babylonian buildings, and it also was the material which received most of their writings. While soft and moist the clay could be engraved by means of a metal stylus, with the greatest ease and swiftness. After passing through the kiln, the solid terra cotta slab or cylinder was of such durability that the inscription could be lost only by the deliberate reduction of the slab to powder. Thus communications and records of all kinds inscribed on tablets, such as those included in the gift of Babylonian fragments made to the Institute by Mr. Stevens, have been preserved through the ages.

These inscriptions, including receipts for temple sacrifices, and for sheep, grain and dates, memoranda, inventories, labels, a promissory note, and a letter, are in cuneiform,

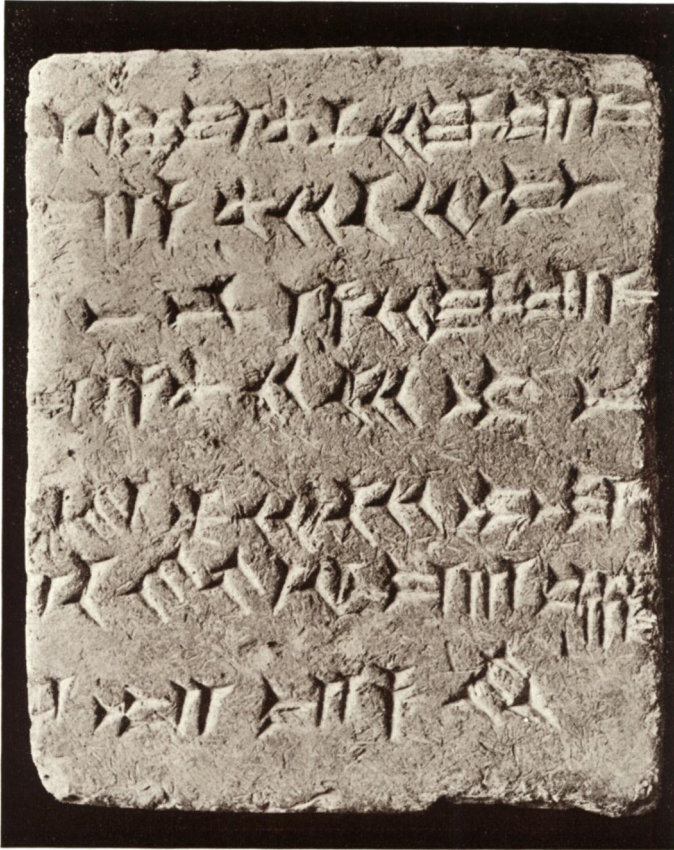


I. II. III.
BABYLONIAN CLAY TABLETS, WITH CUNEIFORM INSCRIPTIONS. I.—RECEIPT FOR REEDS FROM TWO CITIES. II.—RECEIPT FOR GRAIN. III.—ACCOUNT OF SHEEP AND KIDS. AMONG A COLLECTION OF THIRTY-FIVE PRESENTED BY MR. HENRY G. STEVENS.

a system of writing the characters of which are composed of horizontal, vertical, or oblique triangular strokes or wedges, either alone or in combinations. This cuneiform writing was first adopted by the Babylonians after its invention by a people called Sumerians, and was used by them from about 4500 B. C. to the first century B. C. It passed from them to the Assyrians, who used it, with some changes, notably

in recording the life and deeds of the kings on the terra cotta bricks which formed their palaces. Such an inscribed brick, bearing a part of the connected annals of Shalmaneser II. (859-825 B. C.), as recorded probably on the walls of his palace at Ninevah or some other Assyrian residence city, was given to the Institute in 1900 by Mr. George S. Waite of Kalamazoo.

C.C.



ASSYRIAN BRICK FROM THE PALACE OF SHALMANESER. II.—(859-825 B. C.), AT NINEVEH OR OTHER RESIDENCE CITY.
PRESENTED BY MR. GEORGE S. WAITE.